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## LOST IN THE MAZE: FUTURITY AND THE INHUMAN ECONOMY

ECONOFICTION CAPITALISM, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, DIGITAL, DIVIDUAL, INFOBORG

We've all become mere data points in the consumption cycle, our dividual lives of labor running the course of commodity production and exchange as informational agents and products in a knowledge economy. Sipping at the brothel of capital, neither prostitute nor pimp, we've become substitutions and commutations of a hidden financial world: blips in a blockchain, ciphers in a maze of code, transactional accomplices of a criminal enterprise – all absorbed into the endless labyrinths of a world system without beginning or end.

“Neither Saussure nor Marx had any presentiment of all this: they were still in the golden age of the dialectic of the sign and the real, which is at the same time the ‘classical’ period of capital and value. Their dialectic is in shreds, and the real has died of the shock of value acquiring this fantastic autonomy. Determinacy is dead, indeterminacy holds sway. There has been an extermination (in the literal sense of the word) of the real of production and the real of signification.”<sup>1</sup>

Having severed our relations with the referent there is no inside/outside, the irony has itself vanished and been absorbed into the indifferent and impersonal world of code. “Algorithms are no longer seen as tools to accomplish a task: in digital architecture, they are the constructive material or abstract “stuff ” that enables the automated design of buildings, infrastructures, and objects. Algorithms are thus actualities, defined by an automated prehension of data in the computational processing of probabilities. (13)”<sup>2</sup> Prehension in Whitehead’s sense is the experiencing of past events, these being necessary conditions of the experience.<sup>3</sup> Yet, there is the possibility of prehending futurity as well. Futurity is, as Aristotle said, *potentiality*, or as Epicurus put it, a mixture of chance and necessity. The necessity is that the experience must somehow become *datum* for some further experiencing; the chance, or lack of necessity, is the freedom or indeterminacy as to just how or in just what further experiences this status as *datum* may be brought about.

Computers and brains perform similar functions, their both at heart prediction machines. As Andy Clark in *Surfing Uncertainty: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind* reminds us that in dealing with a rapidly and fluently, uncertain and noisy world like ours the brain has become a master of prediction – “surfing waves of noisy and ambiguous sensory stimulation by, in effect, trying to stay just ahead of them” (xiv).<sup>4</sup> Our brain is constantly riding the curve of sensory input, attempting to predict the next piece of data input to better anticipate both errors and the actions or thoughts needed to engage the world successfully.

In our hyperindustrial era in which financial capital is governed by code, by algorithmic predictive capabilities that decipher transactional data in speeds of inhuman power – a world where nanoseconds and time based variables and perimeters can mean the difference between a successful transaction and a total implosion or loss – we’ve entered a realm of pure abstraction outside the human altogether. In this sense as Baudrillard once suggested,

True, all this is in the process of being ‘invested’ and absorbed into the sphere of value, but not so much market value as accountable value; that is, it is not mobilised for the sake of production, but indexed, allocated, summoned to play the part of a functional variable. It has become not so much a force of production as several pieces on the chessboard of the code, caught in the same game-rules. The axiom of production now tends to be reduced to factors, the axiom of the code reduces everything to a variable. (SE: KL 2092)

Our lives have become parametrized variables in an ongoing predictive process of financial capitalism which absorbs every aspect of our lives as datum in an accelerated process of profiteering. Following Marx in his *Grundrisse* the accumulation of objectified labour which

supplants living labour as a force of production has in our new financial and knowledge based capitalism subsequently been multiplied to infinity by the accumulation of knowledge: 'The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital' (Grundrisse[tr. Martin Nicolaus, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973], 694). (SE: KL 2118)

Every aspect of our lives is dominated by these high-speed predictive systems of code to the point that they've become ubiquitous and invisible to us, much like we are blind to the processes of the brain itself. The social brain of general artificial intelligence that is absorbing the accumulated knowledge of humanity is binding us to a dominion of code from which there will be no extrication or exit. As Baudrillard suggests,

Marx's greatest error was to have retained a belief in the innocence of machines, the technical process and science all of which were supposedly capable of becoming living social labour once the system of capital was liquidated, despite the fact that this is precisely what the system is based on. This pious hope springs from having underestimated death in dead labour, and from thinking that death is overcome in the living, beyond a certain crucial point, by a sort of historical somersault of production. (SE: KL 2138)

Instead the machines have become vampires sucking the lifeblood of knowledge out of our meat, our brains. And, yet, Marx did predict that a stage of capital would be reached when man 'steps to the side of the production process, instead of being its chief actor' (ibid., p. 705). Under the regimes of Algorithmic Capital this process has now completed itself, humanity is no longer the chief actor in the production process. "Today the law of value no longer lies so much in the exchangeability of every commodity under the sign of a general equivalent, as it does in a much more radical exchangeability of all the categories of political economy (and its critique) in accordance with the code [algorithms]." (SE: KL 2177)

Just as other generations were able to dream of pre-capitalist society, we have begun to dream of political economy as a lost object. Now, even its discourse carries some referential force only because it is a lost object. (SE: KL 2181) The point here being that in this advance hypereconomy, or inhuman capitalism economy has been severed from politics because it is no longer concerned with humans or their actions. The human has vanished and been obsolesced. All that remains is the finalization of the process of sucking the last remaining life-blood of knowledge into the machine. The hive-mind of the new inhuman economy circulates in an endless maze of 24/7 high-speed transactions and exchanges beyond the human capacity to know or regulate. The eclipse of man comes not by his own hand, but by the very promise and success of his false utopias.

Yet, as Bernard Steigler asks: "The question is therefore the following: if this computational and industrial traceology presents itself today and in fact, through algorithmic governmentality, as the acceleration, crystallization and in a way the precipitation of insolvency, discredit, disindividuation and the generalized entropy that inevitably results from this headlong flight, is it nevertheless

possible to effect a *reversal*, through which the trace could again become an object of social investment?"<sup>5</sup>

As if in answer to Stiegler's question Baudrillard offers the principle of reversibility, saying,

Everywhere, in every domain, a single form predominates: reversibility, cyclical reversal and annulment put an end to the linearity of time, language, economic exchange, accumulation and power. Hence the reversibility of the gift in the counter-gift, the reversibility of exchange in the sacrifice, the reversibility of time in the cycle, the reversibility of production in destruction, the reversibility of life in death, and the reversibility of every term and value of the langue in the anagram. In every domain it assumes the form of extermination and death, for it is the form of the symbolic itself. Neither mystical nor structural, the symbolic is inevitable.

...

The principle of simulation governs us now, rather than the outdated reality principle. We feed on those forms whose finalities have disappeared. No more ideology, only simulacra. We must therefore reconstruct the entire genealogy of the law of Value and its simulacra in order to grasp the hegemony and the enchantment of the current system. (SE: KI 2231)

To underscore such a genealogy we need to understand as well how human desire is captured in the new hyperindustrial era. As Stiegler reminds us the channelling of the drives through the application of mathematical algorithms to automatized social control can do nothing but push these drives to a highly dangerous level, by dis-integrating them – and in so doing creating what Félix Guattari called 'dividuals'. With the advent of reticular reading and writing via networks made accessible to everyone through the implementation, beginning in 1993, of the technologies of the world wide web, digital technologies have led hyper-industrial societies towards a new stage of proletarianization – through which the hyper-industrial age becomes the era of systemic stupidity, which can also be called functional stupidity. (AS: KL 1155)

Gilles Deleuze in *The Fold* (1993) refers to the notion of an *objectile*. As David Savat explains it this objectile has no form and is continually changing. In short, it is a process rather than an object. It is in a very significant sense a flow of information or code. It continues to be important to stress in that regard that modulation should not be seen as replacing discipline, as some are inclined to. In the context of databases, we need to recognize that different modes of power operate in one and the same moment yet can produce very different, and at times antagonistic, effects. One of those effects is the construction of the dividual.<sup>6</sup>

During the first Industrial Era under the classical liberal notions of Subject and subjectivity the individual is central to the construct of the political in the industrialized mechanical ensemble. With the digital ensemble, however, a form of subjectivity is expressed that many have characterized as fluid. I argue that its construction of the political is very different from that of the individual so central to modern political thought. Indeed, Savat argues that it is in the interface, at the point of human-machine assemblage, that a very different sense of the political emerges – one in which flow is critical. (Savat, 7)

At the heart of this politics of flow and flux is the dividual: "the ongoing production of an object

that is molded and we recognize as an individual, and the simultaneous ongoing production of an objectile and an anticipation of flows, which has no form, and which, taking Deleuze's cue, I refer to in the second part of the book as a *superject*, that is at the core of dividuality and therefore at the core of what it means to exist in the so-called digital or control society" (Savat, 16). The superject, following Savat, is, in other words, not an essence but an event (Deleuze 1993). It operates with, or exists, by way of a very different sense of perspective, or rather, a different perception or sensibility from the subject, that is, the individual of the industrialized mechanical ensemble. Deleuze explains this in relation to Baroque perspective:

The point of view is not what varies with the subject, at least in the first instance; it is, to the contrary, the condition in which an eventual subject apprehends a variation (metamorphosis), or: something = X (anamorphosis) . . . It is not a variation of truth according to the subject, but the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject. (Deleuze 1993, 20) (Savat: 132)

In the simulated worlds of our hyperindustrial era the dividual rather than the individual takes precedence. The dividual's existence is temporal, or a projection, and altering a 'point of view', or rather its simulation, is a function of changing the world rather than one's position in it. Indeed, the superject does not have a relation to an object in the manner that the subject has. A distinction between subject and object does not exist, and to the extent that such a distinction might be simulated or even a simulacra, this is a function of the superject. This new form of existence, or being, is the product or expression of the digital ensemble, and a key assemblage in its constitution is the interface. The more complete the interface is, the more the distinction between human and machine is eliminated, and the more the superject, as the state of being of the digital ensemble, is expressed. (Savat, 133)

This sense of our modes of existence being incomplete when we are disconnected from our mobile devices, our tablets, our computers etc. has become apparent in our contemporary digital era. Whereas disconnection from the machine in the old Industrial sense constitutes something of a release from an otherwise limited form of existence in the industrialized mechanical ensemble, in the digital ensemble disconnection is, literally, death for digital being (i.e., the dividual/superject). Being connected to the digital machinic assemblage constitutes the very possibility for digital existence. From this perspective, any form of disconnection, any possible interruption to one's connection to the machine, whether it be a power failure or a disconnection from the server, is detrimental to one's capacity for manifesting oneself, for producing flow/ s and participating in flow/ s. It is a reminder of one's embodied, and (at least from the perspective of digital being) one's limited, existence. From this perspective, any reminder that one is an embodied, and therefore limited entity, is a negative experience. In that respect, digital being strives for smoothness above all else. Central to the production of a smooth experience and existence is a well-functioning interface; for smoothness, of course, is only characterized by a lack of interruption. (Savat, 134-135)

Luciano Floridi tells us that it follows that we are now witnessing an epochal, unprecedented migration of humanity from its Newtonian, physical space to the infosphere itself as its Umwelt, not least because the latter is absorbing the former. As a result, humans will be inforgs among

other (possibly artificial) inforgs and agents operating in an environment that is friendlier to informational creatures. And as digital immigrants like us are replaced by digital natives like our children, the latter will come to appreciate that there is no ontological difference between infosphere and physical world, only a difference in levels of abstraction (see Chapter 3). When the migration is complete, we shall increasingly feel deprived, excluded, handicapped, or impoverished to the point of paralysis and psychological trauma whenever we are disconnected from the infosphere, like fish out of water. One day, being an inforg will be so natural that any disruption in our normal flow of information will make us sick.<sup>7</sup>

Plato in the Symposium once suggested that humans were a split being, unwhole and incomplete:

“According to Greek mythology, humans were originally created with four arms, four legs and a head with two faces. Fearing their power, Zeus split them into two separate parts, condemning them to spend their lives in search of their other halves.” (Plato Symposium)

Our merger with the digital world of devices has brought about a closure on that theme, yet one that harbors a synthetic resolution rather than actual. The *denaturalization* of humanity has been in process for centuries, but only in our time has the engineering of this process taken on urgency as we've begun to migrate out of our natural environment into those artificial climes of the digital.

The hyper-industrial state of fact takes what Deleuze called control societies, founded on modulation by the mass media, into the stage of hyper-control. The latter is generated by self-produced personal data, collected and published by people themselves – whether knowingly or otherwise – and this data is then exploited by applying intensive computing to these massive data sets. This automatized modulation establishes algorithmic governmentality in the service of what Johnathan Crary calls 24/7 capitalism. (Stiegler, KL 2395)

The notion of a 24/7 worlds brings with it a deeper awareness of the sleeplessness and insomnia of our contemporary culture. As Crary remarks 24/7 steadily undermines distinctions between day and night, between light and dark, and between action and repose. It is a zone of insensibility, of amnesia, of what defeats the possibility of experience. To paraphrase Maurice Blanchot, it is both of and after the disaster, characterized by the empty sky, in which no star or sign is visible, in which one's bearings are lost and orientation is impossible. More concretely, it is like a state of emergency, when a bank of floodlights are suddenly switched on in the middle of the night, seemingly as a response to some extreme circumstances, but which never get turned off and become domesticated into a permanent condition. The planet becomes reimagined as a non-stop work site or an always open shopping mall of infinite choices, tasks, selections, and digressions. Sleeplessness is the state in which producing, consuming, and discarding occur without pause, hastening the exhaustion of life and the depletion of resources.<sup>8</sup>

It's this sense that we are being sucked dry, depleted of our knowledge and experience, made stupid beyond belief. Following Crary, Bernard Stiegler provides a further diagnosis, saying,

As 24/7 capitalism and algorithmic governmentality, it hegemonically serves a hyper-entropic functioning that accelerates the rhythm of the consumerist destruction of the world while installing a structural and unsustainable insolvency, based on a generalized stupefaction and a functional stupidity that destroys the neganthropological capacities that knowledge contains: unlike mere competence, which does not know what it does, knowledge is a cosmic factor that is inherently negentropic. (AS: KL 702)

Without going into Stiegler's arcane and complexified postmodern metaphysics what he's getting at is that as the digital systems we use everyday, that we've become so enamored with, enchanted by their ability to augment our minds, memories, intelligence in ways earlier forms of knowledge were unable to do we've allowed ourselves to lose both our memory capabilities (tertiary retention) and our knowledge of 'how-to-live' – our life experience knowledge's. For Stiegler our 24/7 digital economy of personal data (quoting Crary's 24/7) aims 'to reduce decision-making time [and] to eliminate the useless time of reflection and contemplation'. Digital automatons short-circuit the deliberative functions of the mind, and systemic stupidity, which has been installed across the board from consumers to speculators, becomes functionally drive-based as soon as ultra-liberalism begins to privilege speculation and discourage investment, thereby crossing a threshold into functional stupidity. (AS: KL 1170)

In fact as he remarks polemically,

This stupor has been caused by a series of technological shocks that emerged from the digital turn of 1993, which, as their main features and consequences have become manifest, have brought about a state that now verges on stunned paralysis – in particular in the face of the hegemonic power of Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon. (AS: KL 1179)

Like bees who've been lured into a Venus Flytrap seeking the sweet honey of a digital paradise of games, entertainment, news, love, etc., we are now trapped in its meshes, and being slowly dissolved in its acid bath of electronic command and control systems. The stunning and stupefying hyper-industrial epoch was already foreshadowed in what Deleuze called 'control societies'. This is why, concerning the end of the twentieth century, Crary can write: 'As disciplinary norms [...] lost their effectiveness, television was crafted into a machinery of regulation, introducing previously unknown effects of subjection and supervision. This is why television is a crucial and adaptable part of a relatively long transition [...], lasting several decades, between a world of older disciplinary institutions and one of 24/7 control.' The destructive capture of attention and desire is what occurs with the non-coercive power of modulation exerted on consumers by television. These control societies arise along with the conservative revolution, at the end of the consumerist epoch. It is through them that the transition to the hyper-industrial epoch takes place. (AS: KL 1234)

The analog epoch prepared the way for the digital empire and infrastructures that are producing our new world system of control societies. The era of hypercontrol and Big Data, the power of algorithms to govern our thoughts, actions, and behaviors, the temporal and spatial alignment of our brains to a new digital environment, all these factors have shaped us and modulated our

desires toward new capture systems. The modulation by the mass media, into the stage of hyper-control that is generated by self-produced personal data, collected and published by people themselves – whether knowingly or otherwise – and this data is then exploited by applying intensive computing to these massive data sets. (AS: KL 2396) All of this going on while we – oblivious and unconscious of these massive systems of intelligent agents – believe we are just playing and working on the internet. Unaware of the massive entrapment of our desires by these digital systems we continue to publish our blogs, our Face Book entries, our Twit's as if it were free and open communication with friends, clients, customers, etc.. Our idealism and stupidity is killing us.

In a letter to Serge Daney published in Deleuze's book *Negotiations* the question of *resistance* is raised about the new powers of control in society: "This would almost be to ask whether this control might be inverted, harnessed by the supplementary function that opposes itself to power: to *invent* an art of control that would be like a new form of *resistance*."9

For Stiegler this would entail a revisioning of the human, and of the destructive tendencies within our *technics* and *technologies* that we have allowed to outstrip us in knowledge and intelligence. By so doing we've allowed ourselves to become products that no longer have *value*, a commodity that will now be obsolesced unless we can regain new forms of what he terms tertiary retention. This isn't the essay to go into that, I've written on this before (I'll need to add links...).

One thought to leave you with:

All political questions are dissolved into economics, since ideology is no longer about collective choices but about 'individual' relations to products (the individual being a product, too!): 'There is an ever closer linking of individual needs with the functional and ideological programs in which each new product is embedded' (Guattari). These programmed relations give rise to *dividuation* (dividuals) in Guattari's sense, that is, to the destruction of in-dividuation in Simondon's sense – which forms the bases of 'algorithmic governmentality'. (AS: 2553)

We are lost in a maze of code, captured by digital systems that feed off our desires, locked in a virtual hell that has become our new artificial paradise. Stripped of our humanity we're becoming mere algorithms in a vast hypereconomy in which the last remaining powers and dispositions of the human are being methodically vampirized.

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